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SUBJECT: BABIL ISF REACTS SWIFTLY TO FIRST ASSASSINATION OF A PROVINCIAL COUNCIL CANDIDATE, BUT QUESTIONS ABOUND ABOUT PERPETRATORS

CLASSIFIED BY: Kenneth Hillas, Team Leader, Babil PRT, Dept of State.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (SBU) The ISF moved swiftly to respond on January 16 to the assassination that same day of Haytim Kadum Ali Abd Al-Husseiny, number two on Da'wa's list of candidates for the January 31 provincial council (PC) election. Within hours a curfew was imposed on the town of Jabella, where the murder took place, and both Provincial Director of Police(PDoP) BG Fadhil Raddad and IA 31st Brigade Army Commander MG Abdul Ameer were on the scene overseeing the investigation.

¶2. (C) According to Da'wa's party leader Abu Ahmed Al-Basri, several arrests were made late on January 16 and interrogations were underway. More arrests were expected to follow as the ISF developed leads. Al-Basri told the PRT leader that he has confidence in the ability of the ISF to investigate the killing, and he indicated there was no need for U.S. assistance.

According to SWAT Commander Col Abbas Al-Jabouri, Al-Husseiny was implicated in sectarian violence in the Jabella area in ¶2006.

¶3. (SBU) Al-Husseiny was the chair of the Jabella sub-district (nahiya) council. Al-Husseiny was departing in a vehicle from a meeting with voters when he was shot dead by approximately five gunmen in another vehicle. Al-Husseiny four bodyguards were wounded, but only one was reported to be hospitalized and in serious condition.

¶4. (SBU) Jabella's population is mixed Sunni-Shia and it was the scene of sectarian tensions in 2007 and 2008. Coalition and Iraqi Forces raided the offices of OMS, ISCI and Da'wa in Jabella in January 2008 and confiscated weapons and shut down those offices temporarily.

¶5. (C) Comment: This is the first assassination of a PC candidate in Babil during the current election campaign, although there was an unsuccessful attempt on a tribal sheik several weeks ago.

The attack on the sheik, however, may not have been connected to the provincial election. Whether Badr/ISCI was behind the assassination of Al-Husseiny remains to be determined, but on the streets of provincial capital of Al-Hillah the killing of Da'wa's number two PC candidate is viewed as a signal to Da'wa and other parties that ISCI's political dominance will not be ended. Absent some clarification of this question, this perception could have a restraining effect on the candidates of the other parties who are being courted by Da'wa to form an alliance in the next PC. These parties include Sadrists, communists and independents. The gunning down of the number two candidate of PM Al-Maliki's party in broad daylight, if not successfully prosecuted, could have long-term political repercussions. Unfortunately, the justice system does not have a stellar track record in prosecuting high-profile assassinations in Babil. The trial of the accused murderers of former PDoP Qais Al-Mamouy has been postponed four times in the last three months because the police failed to produce the defendants on the trial dates in November, December and again in January. Ironically, the trial venue was moved from Hillah to Baghdad several months ago at the Babil judge's request because of pressures being brought to bear on him by unnamed political figures.

HILLAS

HEATH